



MENTAL MATTERS
IT'S OUR PLAYGROUND
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"You don't have a memory? Rent one or more," the philosopher Jean-François Lyotard declared in the catalogue to the 1985 Les Immatériaux event at the Pompidou Center in Paris—in the chapter on artificial memories. He adds, "The great process of exteriorization of memories (inclusion in a bank of some kind), in this instance artistic, has begun. Memory once haunted us; now one accesses it, consults it. One can even get 'artist pages' on demand: the imaginary museum. Beginnings of a solution to the infernal question of storage. But what is the machine that handles sensibility?"¹

Most of the time the stroboscopic stream that spreads over our screens yields constellations of appealing images, colors, shapes, and textures; the materials, names of artists, sources, and exhibition venues are mixed together. Our capacity for concentration is increasingly akin to hyper-attention,² and our hyperactive gray matter demands constant stimulation, ingests ever greater amounts of content that our human memory alone is not enough to retain. Comparing the human body to hardware³ and behavior to software, the sociologist Theodor H. Nelson⁴ drew a parallel between the Human and the Machine when computer and technological developments were in their infancy in the 1960s. Since then our central processing unit seems to have developed nerve cells that are better adapted to our new way of consuming images, enabling quicker assimilation and storage.

Thus our neurons are apparently raising up part of our encephalon into a kind of Adobe™ series containing a software program for touching up photos, another for page-layout, and a third for graphic design in the service of our memories. Our brain possesses the necessary resources then for transforming the surplus of artworks into a raw material. The collages resulting from these operations, displayed here on the kinds of cloth backdrops generally used by photographers, will become digitized data that will in turn serve as possible material for fashioning new works of art. This is the ecosystem of Mental Matter, which will make our skull a limitless exhibition space.

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¹ In *Inventaire*, published for Les Immatériaux, the "event" that ran at the Pompidou Center in Paris from 28 March to 15 July 1985.

² The term "hyper-attention" was defined by the literary critic N. Katherine Hayles (St Louis, 1943) in 2007 as a form of addiction to media stimulation that increases the number of tasks and sources of information. She sets it against "deep attention," which is a more precise, longer mode of concentration that she associates with reading for a long stretch of time, for example.

³ Theodor Holm Nelson (Chicago, 1937) is an American sociologist and pioneer in the history of



computer technologies. He is considered to be the inventor of the term hypertext, which lies at the heart of his Xanadu project. Begun in 1960, Xanadu prefigured the internet coding protocol (HTTP) such as we have known it since the 1990s.